

We Claim:

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1. A modular furniture system comprising:
a first vertical member comprising:
an outer member having a first opening in a face thereof; and
a first conductive member disposed behind the face of the outer member such that a portion of the first conductive member is disposed near the first opening, the first conductive member being adapted to be coupled to a source of electrical power; and
a first support member comprising a conductive material, the first support member including:
a shank portion for engaging the first opening; and
a contact portion for making electrical contact with the first conductive member.
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2. The modular furniture system of claim 1 further comprising:
a second vertical member, including an outer member and a second conductive member, wherein the first and second vertical members are juxtaposed in a spaced apart, substantially parallel relation, and wherein the second conductive member is adapted to be coupled to a source of electrical power having a polarity opposite that of the first conductive member; and
a second support member substantially identical to the first support member.
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3. The modular furniture system of claim 2 further comprising a power source coupled to the first and second conductive members such that they are of opposite polarity.
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4. The modular furniture system of claim 3 wherein the power source is a low voltage power source.
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5. The modular furniture system of claim 2 further comprising a horizontal member disposed between the first and second vertical members, the horizontal member comprising:

first and second ends adapted to couple to the first and second conductive members; and

at least one electrical fixture coupled between the first and second ends, such that the at least one electrical fixture is electrically coupled to the conductors.

6. The modular furniture system of claim 2 further comprising a panel coupled between the first and second vertical members.

7. The modular furniture system of claim 6 wherein the panel includes at least one electrical fixture, the panel being electrically coupled to the first and second conductive members such that the electrical fixture receives power therefrom.

8. The modular furniture system of claim 6 wherein the panel has a translucent surface and the at least one electrical fixture is a light disposed behind the translucent surface.

9. The modular furniture system of claim 5 or 7 wherein the at least one electrical fixture comprises a socket.

10. The modular furniture system of claim 9 further comprising an electrical device including a plug for mating with the socket such that the electrical device receives electrical power via the socket.

11. The modular furniture system of claim 10 wherein the electrical device comprises a light.

7 12. The modular furniture system of claim 1 wherein the vertical member further comprises:

a second opening in the face of the vertical member, such that the second opening is substantially level with, but spaced apart from, the first opening; and

a second conductive member disposed behind the face of the outer member such that a portion of the second conductive member is disposed near the

second opening, wherein the second conductive member is adapted to be coupled to a source of electrical power having a polarity opposite that of the first conductive member

11 13. The modular furniture system of claim 12 further comprising a second support member comprising a conductive material, the second support member including:

a shank portion for engaging the second opening; and
a contact portion for making electrical contact with the second conductive member.

14. The modular furniture system of claims 2-11, or 13 further comprising a furniture piece coupled between the first and second supporting members.

15. The modular furniture system of claim 14 wherein the furniture piece comprises a shelf, desk, clothes rod, or display case.

16. The modular furniture system of claim 14 wherein the furniture piece comprises a light, the light being electrically coupled to the first and second support members.

17. The modular furniture system of claim 16 wherein the light is disposed on the underside of a shelf, or inside a desk.

18 18. A vertical member for use in a modular furniture system, the vertical member comprising:

an outer member having an opening in a face thereof, the opening adapted for accepting an electrically conductive support member; and
a conductor disposed in proximity to the opening, such that a portion of the support member inserted into the opening makes electrical contact with the conductive member.

19 17. The vertical member of claim 16 wherein the outer member is formed of metal covered with a plastic or powder coating.

20 18. The vertical member of claim 16 wherein the outer member is non-metallic.

21 19. The vertical member of claim 16 wherein the outer member comprises a member having a 'U'-shaped cross section.

22 20. The vertical member of claim 19 wherein the outer member further comprises a bar disposed across an open side of the 'U'-shaped member, the bar having a slot therein for accepting the support member.

23 21. The vertical member of claim 16-20 wherein the conductive member has a tab positioned such that a support member engaged in the vertical member contacts the tab to make an electrical connection therewith.

24 22. The vertical member of claim 19 wherein the conductive member comprises a bar disposed across an open side of the 'U'-shaped member, the bar having a slot therein for accepting the support member.

25 23. The vertical member of claims 16-22 wherein the conductor is brass or copper.

26 24. A support member for use in a modular furniture system having a plurality of vertical members as recited in claim 16, wherein adjacent ones of the plurality of vertical members are of opposite electrical polarity, the support member comprising:

a cantilever portion; and

a shank portion, the shank portion including a first portion for engaging the vertical member and a second portion for contacting the conductor within the vertical member.

27 25. The support member of claim 24 wherein the support member comprises a conductive material.

28 26. The support member of claim 25 wherein the support member is covered with a non-conductive coating.

29 27. The support member of claims 25 or 26 wherein the conductive material comprises a layer of conductive material disposed on a substrate.

30 28. The support member of claim 24 wherein the support member is made of a non-conductive material surrounding a conductive material.

31 29. The support member of claims 24-28 wherein the cantilever portion includes a portion adapted for coupling an electrical device thereto.

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